

Mark Chapter Three

Colour-code summary: the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

Blue = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

Green = something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate

Red = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives

Orange = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

Jesus heals on the Sabbath

1 Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. 2 Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. 3 Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

4 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?"

- **Embrace a spirituality that is life-giving and liberating, not life-sapping and legalistic.**
 - The Pharisees were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus. They knew that he had healed people. They couldn't stop that. They were hoping he would heal someone on the Sabbath, because this would, in their eyes, show that he was disobedient to their traditions, which insisted that no work was allowed to be done on this day.
 - Eventually the day came when Jesus healed someone on the Sabbath. He knew it would cause a stir. So he tried to reason with them by reminding them of the heart behind the Sabbath law. The true heart behind the Sabbath was that it reminded people that they were God's own people. After all, God had rested on the seventh day of creation. In the Jewish mind it also spoke of the promise of a new day when God would rescue his people from bondage to foreign powers. In other words, the Sabbath really spoke of creation and hope. Yet the Pharisees had turned it into a condemning meaningless law. Jesus suggested that the real heart behind the Sabbath was that it was an opportunity to do good, and to save life. It was never meant to harm anyone.
 - Jesus was busy launching his kingdom, which was introducing the future age of God's new world. Jesus was literally on the cutting edge of God's recreation of the world. The heart of life in his kingdom is that we should learn to do good, and to bring life as we partner with him in the advancement of his kingdom. Above all, God really cares about the welfare of his creation and his people. He's not seeking to bind us up in life-sapping, destructive legalism. He wants to see life and liberty freely restoring the lives of broken people.

But they remained silent. 5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.

- Religion can be a really ugly thing.
 - Jesus tried to evoke their sympathy for the man with the shrivelled hand by calling him forward. Jesus tried to reason with them that true spirituality was life-giving and liberating, not life-destroying and legalistic. But sadly, they remained silent. Although they couldn't refute his logic, they hardened their heart (v5) and refused to receive it.
 - The impact their hard-hearts had on Jesus was anger and deep distress. Their lack of compassion did not undermine his compassion. He healed the man with a command, “Stretch out your hand.”
 - Religion can be an ugly thing. It is cold, callous and uncaring. But true spirituality is compassionate, tender-hearted and courageously life-giving.

6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

- As you advance the kingdom of light, you can expect a reaction from the kingdom of darkness.
 - In Mark 1:45 we see that Jesus had quickly become very popular, but along with this favour of the people, rose the suspicion of the Pharisees. They charged him of blasphemy (2:7). They criticized his choice of company (2:16). They complained about him not fasting (2:18). They accused him of Sabbath-breaking (2:24). Eventually there was a sustained hatred of Jesus (3:2). And then the hostility reached a terrible conclusion: the determination to kill him.
 - The Pharisees were the moral and religious watchdogs of the Jews. But they were self-appointed and unofficial and therefore lacked power. Usually they despised those who supported king Herod (i.e. the Herodians), but in their hatred of Jesus they began to plot with them, since they had legal power.
 - We see that as the kingdom of light advances, a back-lash of the kingdom of darkness can be expected in the form of unjust persecution, irrational hatred and the swaying of the powers-that-be to stand against us. Of course, behind all of this back-lash is the kingdom of darkness.

RAISING LEADERS, SETTING PEOPLE FREE AND STARTING A NEW FAMILY (3:8-35)

Crowds follow Jesus

7 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. 8 When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. 9 Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. 10 For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. 11 Whenever the evil [a] spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” 12 But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

Jesus appoints the Twelve

13 Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. 14 He appointed twelve [‘designating them apostles’] that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach 15 and to have authority to drive out demons. 16 These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), 17 James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”), 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

- **If you’re a leader in Christ’s kingdom, then multiply yourself by identifying and training up other leaders.**
 - Jesus was drawing more and more people who were drawn to his signs and wonders ministry (v7-12). His ability to heal people and set people free from afflicting demons drew crowds of people to him from all over his region of the world. He even had to climb in a boat and preach to those on shore because the demand was so great (v9).
 - But he knew that he alone could not minister to them, so he did something brilliant - he chose a team of leaders-in-training who eventually would be able to do what he was doing. This way his kingdom-advancing impact would be multiplied beyond his physical location and even beyond his time on the earth. By raising up leaders who were like him, his ministry would be extended to other places and to future generations.
 - Similarly today, the opportunities are far too great for the present kingdom leaders to cope with. They need to multiply themselves into others so that their impact is multiplied.
 - As we analyze his strategy for raising up leaders, we notice a few things:
 - 1) *It’s the responsibility of leaders to make new leaders.* Jesus, despite all the demands placed on him, doesn’t hope that

- someone else will raise up leaders. He embraces the work that only he can do. After all, only leaders can raise up new leaders.
- 2) *Leaders should pray about which potential leaders to invest their lives in.* Jesus “went up onto the mountain” where he most likely prayed about who he would invite into his training programme (see Luke 6:12). We shouldn’t just judge on what we can see, but also on what we can discern with the help of God.
 - 3) *Leaders should train up other leaders through spending lots of time with them, and by exposing them consistently to their example of life, teaching and ministry.* Jesus called people “to himself” (v13) to “be with him” (v14). For three years, he spent almost all his time with the disciples. He hardly ever ministered without them present with him. It seems Jesus used the following strategy of raising up leaders:
 - *He did it and they watched.*
 - *He let them do it and he watched.*
 - *He left and they still did it.*
 - 4) *Leaders need to communicate expectations to their trainees.* Jesus made it clear to those twelve that after a while (he didn’t say how long) they would be sent out without him, and they would need to continue doing the work he had started (v14-16). This communication of expectation would have made them so much hungrier to learn all they could from Jesus. Leaders today need to train people up to eventually function on their own and continue doing the work that had been modelled to them.
 - 5) *The best training for leadership is followership.* It’s amazing that God trained up the twelve apostles to be leaders by first teaching them to follow another person. If we aren’t willing to follow another person, then we aren’t worthy to lead others. The Bible gives us other examples, such as: Joshua, who became a great leader through following Moses; David, who became a great leader through first following Samuel and Saul; Nehemiah, who became a great leader by following the King he served; and Paul, who became a great leader by first following Barnabas.
 - 6) *Another great training ground is to be trained in the context of a team (v16-18).* Jesus didn’t raise up solitary leaders, but rather a team of leaders. Being trained in the context of a team is powerful because it provides peers; it exposes character issues; and together everyone achieves more.
 - 7) *Leaders need to be realistic about the fact that some trainees will disappoint them deeply.* Even Jesus poured out his life for three years into Judas who would eventually betray him.

Jesus accused by his family and by teachers of the law

20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

23 So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.

27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house.

- **Jesus uses his authority over Satan to set people free from Satan’s power.**
 - Jesus was moving in a miraculous power. It was the power of the kingdom. But people found it difficult to believe that God was really using him as much as it seemed. So different people came up with alternate explanations. His own family (of mothers, brothers and sisters) said that he had gone mad (v21). And the theological experts said that it was the devil’s power (Beelzebul was the arch-demon) that he was operating in (v22).
 - Jesus counter-argues the claim of the theological experts that he was operating in demonic power by explaining that since demons are being cast out, it can’t be Satan doing it, because that would destroy his own kingdom (v23-26).
 - Then, in verse 27, he tells them his true relation to Satan. He explains that, far from being in partnership with Satan, he is radically opposed to and attacking Satan. Satan is like a strong man who guards a house full of captives. Satan does have a kingdom, but all those in his kingdom he holds by force and by deception. But Jesus is “the stronger one” (remember how John described Jesus as “the one stronger than me” 1:6 - in other words, as one more powerful). Jesus has a greater strength and authority than Satan. He had already defeated him in the desert, for example (1:13). He used that power and authority over Satan to set the captives free from Satan’s deceptive and destructive power. This was most obviously seen in his ability to cast out demons.
 - Amazingly, Jesus wants us, his disciples, to also set the captives free by exercising powerful authority over Satan (see Luke 10:19). Jesus still sets people free, but he now does it through his disciples who live and minister under his authority, and with his delegated power and authority.

28 Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven all their sins and all the blasphemies they utter. 29 But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, but is guilty of an eternal sin.” 30 He said this because they were saying, “He has an evil spirit.”

- **Rejecting Christ means that you remain un-forgiven.**
 - Christ is ready to forgive us of anything we’ve done if we put our trust in him (v28). But there is one thing that makes it impossible for him to forgive us - and that is “the eternal sin” of “blaspheming against the Holy Spirit”. But what does this mean? It simply refers to a non-Christian person who, even though they have seen the reality and power of the Spirit of Jesus with their very own eyes, refuses to accept that Jesus is real.
 - Jesus is saying this to the people who refused to accept that he really was moving in the Holy Spirit power of God (v30). He was warning them that if they rejected him, and the fact that he and God were partnering together, then they could never have their sins forgiven.
 - The surest way of not being forgiven is to hard-heartedly reject Christ and his offer of forgiveness, even though he has revealed himself to you with great power.
 - It must be noted that a Christian can never commit this sin. Only a non-Christian can. It’s when they become so hardened in their unbelief that they shut out the possibility of ever trusting in Christ. We must, however, be careful of writing off someone who seems to have committed this sin. As we see in the story of Paul’s salvation (Acts 9:1-5), Christ can win over the most resistant people when we least expect it.

31 Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”

33 “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked.

34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

- **The closer you get to Christ, the closer you get to fellow believers.**
 - Mary, Jesus’ mother, had brought his brothers all the way from Nazareth to Capernaum to try get him to stop what he was doing. They were persuaded that he was insane (see v21). They must have believed that it would be best for him and for the family (perhaps they felt he was dishonouring the family name) if he stopped what he was doing and came home.
 - This is an interesting picture. We see Jesus inside with a bunch of people who have given their trust and allegiance to him. And then we have some people outside who have not. This gives rise to the language of “insiders” and “outsiders” (see Mark 4:11 and 1

Thessalonians 4:12 as examples). “Insiders” are those disciples who have decided to trust and follow Jesus - and to do his will (v35). “Outsiders” are those who, for whatever reason, have not yet moved towards Christ with faith and obedience.

- Jesus is saying in these verses that his real family, the people with whom he feels the strongest connection, are not his physical family but his spiritual family.
 - In the same way, as we discover the wonders of Christ and begin to live our lives for him, we will soon find that we feel a stronger connection to fellow believers than we do to those who don't yet know Christ. If we're “inside”, we have more in common with those “inside” than we have with those “outside”, even if some of the “outsiders” are our own family.
 - It must be noted though that Jesus was not telling people to abandon and reject their physical families. Sadly, this is how many Christian sects have misinterpreted this text, and they have done great damage.
 - It was this teaching of Jesus that surely helped the early church after he was gone to describe the church as a family, for that is what it is. It's a spiritual family, where the closer we get to Jesus, the closer we also get to each other.
- **The more the church is persecuted the more intense the sense of family becomes.**
- There is another insight here, and it surely is one of the points that Mark is trying to make by telling this story here. Mark has told us since chapter two about the build-up of persecution from the Pharisees and the religious authorities, and now even from family members. And then, at the height of being misunderstood and ridiculed, Jesus tells them that they are his true family.
 - The point is this, and it's something that the church has re-discovered throughout history: the more pressure the church comes under, the greater the possibility to experience the richest relationships imaginable. Tough times don't only drive us closer to Christ. They also drive us closer to each other with deeper and deeper levels of affection and commitment.